

Introducing the Napo Archive

Jill Annison

University of Plymouth, UK

Jane Dominey 

Institute of Criminology, University of Cambridge, UK

Probation Journal

2021, Vol. 68(3) 365–370

© The Author(s) 2021



Article reuse guidelines:

sagepub.com/journals-permissions

DOI: 10.1177/02645505211024330

journals.sagepub.com/home/prb



Abstract

This comment piece outlines the genesis of the Napo Archive and the process of its establishment at the Institute of Criminology at the University of Cambridge. It outlines the scope that these resources offer for researchers, students, and for those with a more general interest in probation. It also points to the unique vantage points that these materials could offer in relation to investigations into the historical development of probation policy and practice, and the emergence of Napo as a professional organisation and subsequently as a trade union.

Keywords

Napo (the Trade Union, Professional Association and campaigning organisation for Probation and Family Court Staff), probation, historical criminology, archives, organisational change

Introduction

After the period of turbulence and change that has marked the past 20 years, much of probation's primary documentation, charting more than a hundred years of policy and practice development, has disappeared. This comment piece outlines the process of gathering and saving papers from Napo (formerly the National Association of Probation Officers), alongside other donated items from various probation sources, to form an archive at the Institute of Criminology's Radzinowicz Library

Corresponding Author:

Jane Dominey, Institute of Criminology, University of Cambridge, Sidgwick Avenue, Cambridge CB3 9DA, UK.

Email: jad78@cam.ac.uk

in Cambridge. The scope of this material is outlined, followed by discussion about its potential for informing research in this area and for enriching analysis and debate with perspectives from historical criminology.

The creation and scope of the Napo Archive

In terms of historical context Napo was established in 1912, with the stated objects of:

- a. The advancement of probation work;
- b. The promotion of a bond of union amongst probation officers, the provision of opportunities for social intercourse; and the giving of friendly advice;
- c. To enable probation officers from practical experience by collective action to bring forward suggestions on probation work, and on the reformation of offenders. (Bochel, 1962: 34)

Over time it developed into a professional association and in due course included trade union functions, with a central office and paid secretariat (Jarvis, 1980: 328–329). It now describes itself as 'The Trade Union, Professional Association and campaigning organisation for Probation and Family Court staff' (see <https://www.napo.org.uk/>).

Over the past century or so the history, policies and practices of probation in England and Wales have been explored and analysed in many books and journal articles (see, for instance, Mair and Burke, 2012; Vanstone, 2004), but Napo has not been the key focus of such publications. It was partly to address this gap that the possible creation of an archive for the historical documents that were stored at the Napo Headquarters, then at Chivalry Road in London, was instigated.

Interest in the creation of a Napo Archive coincided with the plans for the celebration of the centenary of Napo in 2012 and this timing propelled the development of the project. At this point there were logistical and practical issues to be considered: the desire to save such materials needed to go beyond simple storage, but rather to ensure that they could be listed/catalogued and made available to anyone interested in historical research in this area. After much consultation and consideration of these matters, it was agreed that the archive would be lodged with the Radzinowicz Library at the Institute of Criminology and arrangements were made for the physical transfer of this wide range of documentation.¹ A Napo Archive Advisory Group, comprising Napo staff, probation academics and staff from the Radzinowicz Library, was established to oversee the creation of the archive. These developments were announced at the Napo AGM held in Torquay in October 2012 (Annison, 2012).

The original scoping of the material held at Chivalry Road prior to its transfer to Cambridge was informed by knowledge of what was there from the Napo staff at that time. For example, it was known that much documentation had been destroyed in a flood at a previous office location, but some had survived from the earliest days of Napo. On an impressionistic level it was clear that most of the material dated from the 1960s onwards, ranging from books to policy documents, briefing papers, and so on. On a pragmatic level when thinking through what would be transferred,

it was decided to have an approximate cut-off date of 2000, both to ensure confidentiality of personal information, and also because published materials were likely to be available in digital format.

The material was moved from Chivalry Road to Cambridge in July 2013. The process of selecting and packing objects, paper records and books was undertaken by volunteers from the Archive Advisory Group, who found themselves having to act swiftly in response to staff moves and office changes at Napo. In consequence, and as is frequently the case with archive materials, the selection of items moved to the library reflects a process that is partly considered and systematic, but partly haphazard and opportunistic (see, for instance, Hoeflich, 2007).

Since their arrival at the Institute of Criminology these materials have been transferred into 55 archival storage boxes and descriptive lists of the contents have been made. The material is not yet catalogued; the library currently has the capacity to list the materials, but not undertake professional archival work. There is a rich mix of documents: books, newsletters, meeting minutes, letters, campaigning literature and photographs. The oldest material includes journals from the 1920s and notebooks and records from the 1930s. Almost all the documents are about the organisational work and concerns of Napo, but there are a handful of old registers detailing an early 20th century probation caseload.

The Napo boxes are located alongside other probation materials which have been deposited at the Radzinowicz Library, and, in the years since the arrival of the material at the Institute, a selection of items has been put out on display for attendees at some of the Bill McWilliams Memorial Lectures,² which are held annually at the University of Cambridge (see <https://www.ccsj.crim.cam.ac.uk/mcwilliams>).

The potential of the Napo Archive

For current and past probation staff there is much of interest within the Napo Archive: for example, there are documents relating to key initiatives and developments at local and national levels (see Annison, 2013), many of which are further illustrated with information and photographs from the proceedings of Napo Annual General Meetings. The archive material shows, in the first half of the 20th century, close links between Napo officers and senior politicians and civil servants; there are personal letters and invitation cards to 'at home' events. There are glimpses of the impact of wider events on the operation of the probation service, for example with discussion of the implications of staff leaving to volunteer to fight in the second world war.

The material is, though, more than a history of Napo as an organisation; there is much that is relevant for academics, researchers and students of probation, particularly from an historical criminology perspective. As noted recently, such engagement can offer 'a fuller integration of historical approaches and ways of thinking into criminology', and 'would seem to evoke promising new directions for criminological scholarship; broadening its chronological frame of reference; historicizing its core topical concerns; (and) infusing previously marginal disciplinary perspectives' (Churchill et al., 2019). Such an approach also aligns with the proposition that:

Systematic archival research offers us new vantage points from which to critically appraise the continuities and dislocations within contemporary penal policy and drill down into those key signal events. (Guiney, 2020: 88)

In this respect it is likely that material within the Napo Archive could offer as yet uncharted 'vantage points' into key elements of probation policy and practice, potentially giving insights into the contemporary situation, or informing and illustrating specific aspects of probation work. For example, themes including interventions with women, unpaid work/community service, training and qualifications, and policy development recur throughout probation's history and are the subject of debate in reports, letters and records. The back copies of the Napo newsletter (more informal and more frequently published than the Probation Journal) are a potentially rich source for study as they chart probation's fluctuating priorities. Napo newsletters from this period of time, unlike the Probation Journal, are not available online making the copies held in the Radzinowicz Library particularly valuable.

Moreover, as proposed by Lawrence (2019) in relation to criminal justice more generally, material in the Napo Archive could be drawn on to inform and analyse probation developments and issues and, in particular, to provide:

A more nuanced, shared understanding of micro-macro change over time...; and a method for identifying and analysing instances of historical recurrence, particularly in ideas, perceptions and discourses around crime and justice. (Lawrence, 2019: 509)

The Napo Archive thus provides a rich resource of material which can be located within this burgeoning interest in historical criminology. It also offers the potential of drawing on a newly available, and thus a unique and under-explored, source.

Listening to the past, speaking to the future

If, as we argue, archive material is valuable because of its contribution to current understanding and scholarship, then there is considerable merit in maintaining archives and adding to their collections. As well as the Napo archive, the Radzinowicz Library now holds smaller collections of documents and records donated by Probation Trusts, the Probation Association, the Probation Chiefs Association, former Chief Probation Officers and academics. Continuing to build this collection will enable probation scholarship that listens to the past while speaking to the future (Museums, Libraries and Archives Council, 2004).

A particular challenge for probation is that subsequent waves of reorganisation have led to fragmentation Dominey and Gelsthorpe (2020). The move from local Probation Services, through Areas and Boards, and on to the creation of the National Probation Service and the Community Rehabilitation Companies, has led not only to disjointed service delivery, but also to a loss of the people and resources that encouraged staff to pursue links between theory, research and practice. A number of longstanding local Probation Services maintained libraries of books, reports and records, and employed specialist Information Officers who, alongside

reviewing data about the practice of the service, had a role in encouraging the use of this material. If current probation providers are no longer maintaining such records, then probation (as an occupation and profession) risks losing its collective memory. Probation without a sense of history is 'surfing on the surface of the present' (Aas, 2012: 14), adding weight to the sense that continuity with past practice is lost, and the move from probation-as-social work to probation-as-public protection is complete and irrevocable (Senior, 2016).

All the material collected from Napo and other probation donors is paper-based. Informal meeting records and hand-annotated campaigning notes are among the more interesting items and potentially illuminate how policies and practices were debated and developed. This contrasts with the current situation where working documents such as these are now sent electronically and stored online; they tend not show emerging thoughts and the process of arriving at a final version. The materials in the Napo Archive and associated probation documents from this earlier era thus provide a valuable resource. Finding ways of capturing the contemporary debate will be an on-going challenge for all organisations and archives not just those recording probation's contemporary history (see Cain, 2003).

Conclusion

The archive material now held at the Institute of Criminology at Cambridge provides more than an insight into the activities and priorities of Napo from the 1920s into the 21st century, it also sheds light on a number of topics that engaged practitioners in the past, but continue to be relevant today. We want to encourage students, academics and practitioners to access this archive and utilise its materials,³ and, in so doing, build knowledge and undertake research that can benefit and contribute to current probation policy and practice.


Declaration of conflicting interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

ORCID iD

Jane Dominey  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5577-8643>

Notes

1. The support and engagement of a number of individuals at the Institute of Criminology has been crucial. Particular thanks are extended to Professor Loraine Gelsthorpe, Director of the Institute of Criminology, and Stuart Stone and Mary Gower, current and former Radzinowicz Librarians.

2. 'Bill McWilliams, who died in 1997, had a prestigious career as a probation practitioner, researcher and writer. His quartet of articles on the probation service's development up to the point at which the "punishment in the community" debate began, is now widely regarded as its definitive history of ideas. To keep his spirit alive, a group of Bill's relatives, colleagues and friends established The Bill McWilliams Memorial Lecture' (information taken from NAPO Magazine, accessed at <https://www.napomagazine.org.uk/2019/02/06/probation-vision-and-values/>).
3. Public access to archive material held at the Institute of Criminology will not be possible until the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions have eased. The Institute librarian (crimlib@hermes.cam.ac.uk) is able to provide further information and to register interest. For further information about library access see <https://www.crim.cam.ac.uk/library>.

References

- Aas KF (2012) "The earth is one but the world is not": criminological theory and its geopolitical divisions. *Theoretical Criminology* 16(1): 5–20.
- Annisson J (2012) 'Creating a Napo Archive: A Collaborative Project', presentation at the Napo AGM at Torquay, Devon, on 6th October, 2012.
- Annisson J (2013) 'Innovation in Probation Practice: Past, Present and Future', *Probation Journal*, 60(3): 227–241.
- Bochel D (1962) A brief history of N.A.P.O. *Probation Journal* 10(3): 33–36.
- Cain M (2003) Managing technology: being a library of record in a digital age. *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 29(6): 405–410.
- Churchill D, Yeomans H and Lawrence P (2019) The uses of historical criminology, on *The British Society of Criminology Blog* November 2019 Available at: <https://thebscblog.wordpress.com/2019/11/> (accessed 16 January 2020).
- Dominey J and Gelsthorpe L (2020) 'Who Cares? Probation Practice and Privatisation' In Gelsthorpe L, Mody P and Sloan B (eds) *Spaces of Care* Oxford: Hart.
- Guiney T (2020) Excavating the archive: reflections on a historical criminology of government, penal policy and criminal justice change. *Criminology and Criminal Justice* 20(1): 76–92.
- Hoeflich MH (2007) Serendipity in the stacks, fortuity in the archives. *Law Library Journal* 99(4): 813–828.
- Jarvis FV (1980) *Probation Officers' Manual*. London: Butterworths.
- Lawrence P (2019) Historical criminology and the explanatory power of the past. *Criminology and Criminal Justice* 19(4): 493–511.
- Mair G and Burke L (2012) *Redemption, Rehabilitation and Risk Management: A History of Probation*. London: Routledge.
- Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (2004) *Listening to The Past, Speaking to The Future: Report of The Archives Task Force*. London: Museums, Libraries and Archives Council.
- Senior P (2016) Privatising probation: The death knell of a much-cherished public service? *The Howard Journal of Crime and Justice* 55(4): 414–431.
- Vanstone M (2004) *Supervising Offenders in the Community: A History of Probation Theory and Practice*. Aldershot: Ashgate.